

German Immigration to St. Clair County, Illinois

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In the 1800s many Germans moved to St. Clair County, Illinois. There were two major waves of German immigrants to St. Clair County. The first wave was in the beginning of the 1830s. The second wave of immigrants came in 1848. Each wave came for different reasons. However, all the Germans had a major impact on politics, industry and education in St. Clair County.

Beginning in the 1830s Germans started to arrive in St. Clair County. Most of the people that arrived in St. Clair County were revolutionaries in Germany. They called their movement the “Burschenschaften” Movement. When it failed, they moved to America for a new life. When they came over, they brought over their culture, beliefs, and much more. Germans came to the Midwest because they were attracted to the rich farmland. They first moved to Missouri, but many of the Germans were opposed to slavery, so they went across the river to Illinois. The first two families to come to St. Clair County were the Maurer and Borman family. The Bormans were blacksmiths. Many of the families that came to the area were farmers. They were called “Latin Farmers” because they were well educated.

One important German revolutionary who settled in St. Clair County was Gustave Koerner. He had lived in Frankfurt, Germany. During the movement he was wounded. He disguised himself as a woman and went to France but left France to go to America. He went to St. Clair County because he had relatives there. In 1852, Gustave Koerner was elected Lieutenant Governor of Illinois. He was a Democrat at first. He did not

agree with Steven Douglas, a leader of the Democratic Party, though. He decided to leave the Democratic Party and go to the Republican Party. While in the Republican Party, Koerner was considered Abraham Lincoln's political tactician during the Chicago Convention. Gustave Koerner was given much credit for Lincoln's nomination.

The second wave of German immigrants came in 1848. They were called the Forty-Eighters. The Forty Eighters came here because of the Revolution of 1848 in Germany. The Forty-Eighters were liberals, republicans, radical reformers, college professors, students, pastors, lawyers, judges, physicians, scientists, musicians, farmers, journalists, and educators. Because of their strong education, the Forty-Eighters were dominant in education, politics, and culture. They were also influential during the Civil War. More than four thousand Forty-Eighters enlisted to fight in the Civil War. Most of the Forty-Eighters were already trained soldiers because they had fought in Germany. The Forty-Eighters had a big impact in this area.

An immigration company called the Giessener Gesellschaft was responsible for bringing many of the Forty-Eighters to St. Clair County. The company brought thousands of revolutionaries from the Revolution of 1848 over to the United States. Many of them settled in St. Clair County. The town of Belleville was the first important German settlement in Illinois. German immigrants started an industry that had a big influence on the area. It made the town of Belleville the second largest producer of manufactured goods, particularly farming equipment, in the state of Illinois. The industry contributed to the industrial movement in Illinois. It left a mark on local, state, and national history by establishing one of the earliest and largest manufacturing facilities in the United States.

John Bowman was another important German immigrant who came to St. Clair County. He settled in Illinoistown in 1858. He was a politician. In 1868, John Bowman became the mayor of Illinoistown. He renamed it East St. Louis. In 1872, John Bowman granted land for the stockyards in East St. Louis, which became a major industry in the area for almost a century. John Bowman created East St. Louis, but he could not control it. At this time there was a lot of flooding in East St. Louis from the Mississippi River. John Bowman wanted to raise the streets of East St. Louis so the town would not flood. The people who wanted this were called the high-graders. The low-graders did not support John Bowman because they thought raising the streets would bankrupt the city. This tore the city in two. East St. Louis had two mayors, two city councils, and two police forces. The two police forces started to fight each other. On November 20, 1885, John Bowman was assassinated outside his home. The low-graders' police force was arrested for assassinating John Bowman. The high-graders still followed through with John Bowman's plan though. In 1887, the new mayor decided to raise the streets. East St. Louis almost went bankrupt though.

There have been a lot of German immigrants that have influenced this area. From Borman to Maurer, from the Latin farmers to the Forty-Eighters, from Koerner to Bowman, these immigrants are a few that had a big impact on industry, education, and politics. America was a place for a new life and the Germans took advantage of it. From the 1830s to present day, the Germans continue to influence St. Clair County, Illinois.

[From Thomas O. Jewett, *The Belleville Germans*; Labor and Industry Museum, "Belleville History," <<http://www.laborandindustrymuseum.org/BellevilleHistory.shtml>> (Oct. 6, 2007); *Made in USA: East St. Louis Story*. Producer Jim Kirchherr.

Videocassette. KETC-TV, St. Louis, 2003; Bill Nunes, *Illustrated History of East St. Louis*; and Andrew J. Theising, *Made in USA: East St. Louis: The Rise And Fall Of An Industrial River Town.*]